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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sugary Drink Warning Labels Shown to be Effective in Changing Teenagers' Unhealthy Habits

DAVIS, CALIF., SEPTEMBER 8, 2016 ... Adolescents who see warnings for sugary drinks—like those to be required on ads in [San Francisco](#) and proposed in [California](#) and [New York](#) on labels—are significantly less likely to choose sodas, sports drinks and other sugar-sweetened beverages, according to a study from the University of Pennsylvania [published today](#) in the “American Journal of Preventive Medicine.”

“This study builds upon prior findings that sugary drink warning labels will work as intended and shows a significant impact on soda’s prime consumer base: teenagers,” says Dr. Harold Goldstein, executive director of Public Health Advocates. “Overwhelmingly, teens reported that the warning labels succeeded in convincing them that sugar-sweetened beverages are unhealthy when compared to other products.”

That’s good news for policymakers and health advocates around the nation who are considering warning labels as a means of reducing sugary beverage consumption, which scientific evidence identifies as a leading and direct contributor to type 2 diabetes, obesity and tooth decay.

Large, Robust Study Surveys 2,000+ Teenagers

The study’s authors recruited 2,202 diverse adolescents aged 12-18 years old to participate in an online shopping experience. The researchers then assigned the teenagers to one of three groups: a control group for whom sweetened beverages displayed no special label; a second group for which sweetened beverages displayed the American Beverage Association’s voluntary “[Clear on Calories](#)” label of calories per bottle or can; or a third group, in which sweetened beverages displayed various warning labels. They were then asked to select one beverage from a simulated vending machine containing a variety of drinks, sweetened and unsweetened.

The warning labels were found to be nearly three times more effective in convincing teens to select a healthier beverage as the “Clear on Calories” label. Compared to the control group, the warning labels reduced the number of teens who chose a sugary drink by an average of 17 percent, versus a decline of just 6 percent for the industry’s current calorie label.

Overwhelming Support for Warning Label

After completing the purchasing simulation, the teenagers were asked about their beliefs regarding sugary drinks. 63 percent of all participants stated that they would support legislation requiring a warning label on sugary drinks. Only 8 percent opposed the policy. Overall, most participants reported that a warning label

would change their beliefs about a beverage’s healthfulness and would encourage them to purchase fewer sugar-sweetened beverages in the future.

“This study confirms that warning labels provide consumers with the scientific information they need to make informed purchasing decisions,” says Dr. Harold Goldstein, executive director of Public Health Advocates. “If we don’t make this information available, many teenagers will continue to unknowingly buy products that are contributors to type 2 diabetes, obesity, tooth decay and other harmful chronic diseases. The beverage industry’s voluntary labels may be clear about calorie content, but they say nothing about the specific dangers of beverages like sodas, sweet teas, and sports, energy and fruit drinks.”

“The Influence of Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Warnings: A Randomized Trial of Adolescents’ Choices and Beliefs” was [published online](#) today in the “American Journal of Preventive Medicine.” The study was funded by the [Healthy Eating Research Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#). It comes on the heels of another study which showed that the city of Berkeley’s [soda tax](#) successfully reduced sugary drink consumption by 21 percent in low-income neighborhoods.

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[Public Health Advocates](#), formerly the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA), is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization at the forefront of solving the obesity and diabetes epidemics by advocating for groundbreaking policies that build a healthier California. The Center played a leading role in removing soda and junk food from public schools, passing California’s landmark restaurant menu labeling law and advocating for a statewide soda warning label law. For more information visit: www.phadvocates.org.

Editor’s Note: A fact sheet covering the study is available online [here](#). The full study is available [here](#).